The role of public art in forging hybrid »realist-modernist« architecture and public spaces in the GDR

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Jessica R. Jenkins: The role of public art in forging hybrid »realist-modernist« architecture and public spaces in the GDR, in: Bußmann, Frédéric. / Kopka, Diana (Hrsg.): Matrix Moderne | Ostmoderne. Bauen, baubezogene Kunst und Formgestaltung in Ostdeutschland und dem Europa der Nachkriegszeit. (Aurora. Chemnitzer Schriften zu Kunst und Kultur, Bd. 3). Heidelberg: arthistoricum.net 2023, S. 56-70, https://doi.org/10.11588/arthistoricum.1170.c16397

The conference *Modern Matrix: Eastern European Modernism* (1–2 October 2021, Chemnitz) and the concurrent touring exhibition *70 Jahre Kunst am Bau*[1] mark the entry of the art, design and architecture of the GDR into the institutional mainstream. Given the precarious journey towards this posthumous revival via the ›matrix of modernism‹, it may seem provocative to argue that the public art and architecture of the former GDR was certainly modern and partially modernist, but at the same time retained a socialist realist character. The recent modernist revival of sorts can be viewed as an effort of ›retrieval‹ in the light of broader heavily politicised discourses around heritage value shadowed by questions of national identity; socialist realism is confined to the early 1950s and seen as an entirely different and even oppositional period. In this essay I will make the case that in East German modernism some of the principles of socialist realism were sustained, and that these help to identify the specificity of this building culture, which should be part of the current partial rehabilitation of this heritage. The specificity with which this paper deals is the significance of public art within the built environment in the former GDR, which I propose can be termed a hybrid *realist-modernist* presence in the built environment.

The period of East German art and architecture we would most credibly frame as modernist runs from 1955 to the mid 1970s. However, as soon as we try to position it temporally, aesthetically and theoretically alongside currents in the West and internationally, we encounter the same dilemma that was well understood at the time, that of the

uneven developments of architecture and design on the one hand, and painting and sculpture on the other.

At the fifth congress of the German Artists' Union in 1964, at which a number of artists spoke out against a conservative and dogmatic form of realism, the prominent artist Bernard Heisig made the bold claim that:

> »Driven by economic necessity rather than ideological motivation, architecture is beginning to look *class indifferent*, whereas art comes to look like an aesthetic luxury, [...] hardly useful in modern architecture.«[2]

Heisig's observation, that functional economic domains of architecture and design had taken a broadly modernist trajectory leaving behind the fine arts, foretold the complexity of our task as we try to position what has become termed the *Ostmoderne*[3] (East Modernism) within the ever-expanding compendium of twentieth century modernism. When he spoke of the ›class indifferent‹ character of architecture, Heisig implicitly referred to the socialist realist principle that art must have ›class character‹ [*Klassencharakter*]. This seemed to be undermined by the attempts to create a *synthesis* of modern architecture with socialist realist art, the new orthodoxy as the national tradition ideal was lost to the new building techniques. Socialist realism in the fine arts, which jettisoned abstraction of form and other explorations as undermining the immediacy of the socialist message, remained official cultural policy into the 1960s and beyond. In practice this meant that modern, and here I mean the serialised, scalable, industrially produced, materially and aesthetically economic architecture, had to be in union with art of a different kind of scale and character. (The practicalities of having architects work directly with artists at the planning stage was also a major obstacle to achieving the synthesis outcome.) Heisig's intervention was of course a plea for a liberation of art from the orthodoxy of socialist realism as it was interpreted by the cultural authorities, and he himself illustrated his intentions with a series of graphically modern murals in the Hotel Deutschland in Leipzig.[4]

Whilst modernist principles and aesthetics held a magnetism for many practitioners and theorists who in David Bathrick's terms functioned ›on both sides of the power divide‹[5], many, particularly those of the post-war generation, worked towards an understanding of art and architecture which was at the same time socialist *and* distinct from developments in the Capitalist West.[6] The urban plans, architecture and public art which emerged as a result of the confluence of political and ideological proscriptions, economic constraints as well as political, creative and intellectual innovation has a specificity which is significant not only historically but also in terms of the evaluation of heritage worthy of protection.

National tradition: building as art [*Baukunst*] 1950–1955.

To discuss the foundational influence of the tenets of socialist realism on later developments in East German modernism, it is helpful to look at the period of reconstruction (1949–1955) where the early antagonisms of the Cold War determined the cultural political sphere.

As the historically referencing architecture or *Baukunst* of national tradition aligned to the principle of ›socialist in form, national in content‹, sculptures and decorative arts could be integrated within architecture in continuity with the selectively appropriated architectural traditions. The socialist content could be achieved through an iconographic transfer aligned to the new socialist value system. Thus, figures of the builder, the farmer, the learner, the teacher, the musician and artist were to be found on *supraportes* and in niches which, in the classical traditions this architecture drew from, might have been occupied by allegorical figures. This was evident in the grand ensembles of the period, for example in Stalinallee in Berlin, where ornamental motifs, flora and fauna were sculpted into the ceramic decorative tiling alongside indices of communism such as wheatsheaves, starbursts and socialist commemorative texts. Through simple semantic exchange, the new order was made solid. For the reconstructed Technical Hochschule buildings in Dresden, Magdelena Kreßner, Max Lachnit, Wilhelm Landgraf, Reinhold Langner and others created a series of reliefs and sculptures (1953–1958) which stood for the scientific and technical functions of the college, the importance of the arts, student life in general, and through these delivered further messages relating to the architectural construction metaphor of building socialism and the equality of women with men. For the *Ringbebauung* in Leipzig, a colossus comprised of classical and baroque references punctuated with figurines of children engaged in wholesome activities, Gisela and Alfred Thiele designed brick reliefs which conveyed the principles of the importance of literacy and equality through narrative vignettes. Many artists and architects of the period made the necessary adjustments to their work to meet the new demands of the contract giver.

These ensembles were the imprint of socialist realism in the 1950s. They offered an aesthetic regime which could pit itself against the avant-garde and modernism. Whilst not entirely original, the rejection of artistic autonomy in favour of political connectedness, and the demand for rootedness in place and tradition, did offer material signifiers of the political order. But as industrially produced and typed building was embraced after 1955, the model of *Baukunst* with its socialist writability threatened the manifestation of socialist content. This had already been anticipated by Khrushchev as he ushered in the ideal of the ›synthesis of art and architecture‹, nine months before his famous speech to the All Union Builders' Congress denouncing

›superficial ornament‹.[7] The ›synthesis of art and architecture‹ was not a concept born of the ideological dilemma of maintaining socialist distinctiveness, but it served it well. The importance of reliefs, sculptures and decorative works to ›guarantee the socialist character‹ of architecture was duly relayed to East German architects and artists in Berlin in 1954 by Soviet art critic, Fjodorov Davydov.[8] As system-built, concrete architecture proliferated across East German towns in the 1960s, so did a new generation of murals, mosaics and sculptures charged with making ›a concrete expression of the socialist spirit of the present.‹[9] As scholars of the *Ostmoderne* have demonstrated, this new architecture has aesthetic, technological and social qualities which deserve recognition.[10] In the following I want to consider the continued presence of socialist realism in its officially sanctioned definitions which differentiate East German modernism from its Western counterparts.

The typical

One of the trickiest concepts which emerge from the discourse of socialist realism is that of *the typical*. Boris Groys argues that socialist realism was the heir of the avant-garde, for which aesthetics and politics are also identical.[11] Both rested on the idea of movement towards an all encompassing ideal, a new reality still to come into being. As Groys sets out through reference to official pronouncements by Stalin and Malenkov, realism was not naturalism or mimesis of actual conditions, but a vision tightly determined by Party objectives, through what is translated into English as Party-mindedness [*Parteilichkeit*].

At the Nineteenth Party Congress in 1952, Georgii Malenkov elaborated: »As our artists, writers, and performers create their artistic images, they must constantly bear in mind that the typical is not that which is encountered the most often, but that which most persuasively expresses the essence of a given social force. From the Marxist-Leninist standpoint, the typical does not signify some sort of statistical mean … The typical is the vital sphere in which the party spirit of realistic art is manifested. The question of the typical is always a political question.«

Katherina Clark also identifies the idea of the typical in Andrei Zhdanov's founding conceptualisation of socialist realism set out at the First Writers' Congress, in which he called for the new Soviet literature to combine ›the most matter-of-fact, everyday reality and the most heroic prospects.‹ In Clark's reading, the typical was the dialectic between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the everyday and the heroic.[12]

The *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch der DDR* stretches its definition of the typical over four thousand words, encompassing its canonical

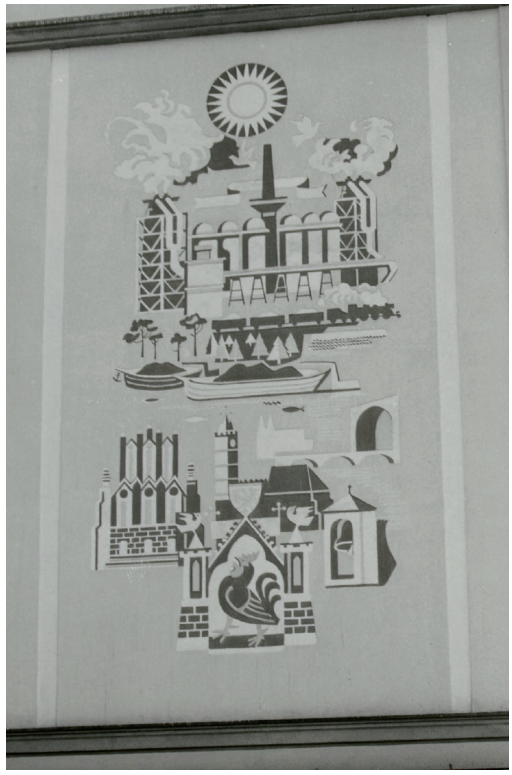
formulation and variants, but these in essence correspond to the formulations of Malenkov and Zhdanov.[13] »In socialist realist art, finding the truth and commitment to the Party merge as one. The aim is not simply to find a ›correct picture‹ of the existing reality. Through typification the existing reality is transcended by the artistic thought.«[14]

In the years of its development of the doctrine in the Soviet Union, socialist realism was defined as a fusion of ›truth‹ and party beliefs. A representation did not accurately or naturalistically reflect the existing circumstances but made an affirmative statement. It is therefore worth considering the extent to which public art, as it continued to be a part of the new architecture in the GDR post-national tradition, offered a pictorial vision which represented this merging of truth and party commitment. To consider this, I have drawn together in the first instances the themes of socialist realist art which were set by the thorough formalisation of the commissioning processes as offices for architectural art from the mid-1960s. I argue that these themes can be considered as ›typical‹, in the socialist realist sense.

The predominant themes, as diversely interpreted as they were, were as follows: the historical trajectory from imperialism and its principle heroes particularly in Party or commemorative settings; peace; nature; the seasons; folklore; friendship of the peoples; education and learning; agriculture; industry; construction; the arts; science; space; male and female figures as nudes or playing specific roles; childhood and youth.

In the illustrations we can see the longevity of the themes and at the same time the range of interpretations. How do these conform to the concept of the typical? If we overlook for a moment the ways the themes were interpreted and consider how they represented the socialist vision, we know that whilst some themes remained constant, others emerged as the geopolitical and technological conditions changed. Therefore, these themes were not simply political conjecture, but adapted in line with industrial and societal changes. Predominant motifs of the 1950s were agriculture, industry, reconstruction and literacy; in the 1960s science, chemistry, space exploration, youth and higher levels of learning predominated. [Fig. 1, 2]

To understand how these themes functioned, we can comfortably adopt the Barthesian concept of mythologies, which actually gives us the fusion of what is depicted and what is imagined, and this resembles the proposition of the typical.[15] Considered as *myths,* these themes are neither true or untrue, but they are highly recognisable within the given societal context and would penetrate the public consciousness. Although it might appear that the relationship between the signifier (for example the cosmonaut) and signified (for example the Soviet triumph in the space race) is so explicit and supported through multiple parallel media that there is hardly room for anything



[1] Rudolf Gruenemann, *Landwirtschaft, Industrie* [Agriculture, Industry], Frankfurt/Oder 1955 (Lichtspieltheater or cinema, one of two murals on the sections left and right of the front portal)

[2] Dietrich Fröhner, *Industrie und Landwirtschaft* [Industry and Agriculture], Zerbst, Anhalt 1974 (Wohnhochhaus or residential apartment block)

as subtle as connotation, this would nonetheless be at work at several levels, including the context of viewing. Barthes was concerned with implicit ideological content, whereas in the determinist Marxist-Leninist vision the ideological content was explicit and set out to be easily read, rather than unconsciously absorbed as in Barthes' deconstruction of capitalist-consumerist French culture of the 1950s. Whether the value system is subtly imparted as in Barthes' examples or explicitly set out as in socialist realist art themes, in both cases a fusion of truth and ideals are at work.

Given the longevity of the themes, we can also ask whether this repetition, which existed not only in art but across cultural and information streams, was a technique of ritualistic repetitiveness, as claimed in Andrei Sinyavsk's 1960 critique of Soviet socialist realism.[16] Here, I would suggest that the strategies of artists (tolerated by the authorities in the Honecker period following the VIII party congress) with their increasingly fluid interpretations, and the individual *Handschriften* of the artists would mitigate the repetitive effect in the art-

works themselves.[17] Furthermore, in public art, the titles of works were often not evident. Therefore, whilst the visionary aspect of the typical was sustained, the effectiveness of the artworks in communicating this was reduced over time.

Critical Assimilation of Historical Tradition

The second aspect of the socialist realist method I will consider is the critical assimilation of historical tradition. The aim of the drawing in of particular traditions was to create something suprahistorical, in Zhdanov's words, ›critically assimilating the cultural heritage of all nations and all times in order to choose from it all that can inspire the working people of Soviet society [...].‹[18] This method was insisted upon in the early Stalinist period in the GDR. In practice, East German artists, constrained in their artistic development and with limited exposure to international trends, would frequently draw on past traditions and use these as a vehicle for socialist content, (particularly but not exclusively from early 20th century modernism) and carried on this practice well beyond the Stalinist period.

In spite of the strictly secular world view of party-loyal art, it was acceptable to furnish the socialist narratives with sacral qualities. One of the most prolific artists and ardent defenders of realism, Walter Womacka, was adept at fusing his own modernist-leaning graphic vernacular with diverse traditions. He innovated in the use of stained glass, a technique first used in a triptych of windows for a kindergarten in Eisenhüttenstadt, where Womacka was appointed city artist in 1955. The sacral allusion is used in the Saxony concentration camp memorial, *Triptychon des antifaschistischen Widerstandes* [Triptych of the antifascist resistance], 1961, and again in the Humboldt University Berlin Aula foyer, where three arch-formed stained-glass windows illustrate the embedding of great scientists within the socialist tradition, 1962/1963. In the largest stained glass work, *Aus der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* [From the History of the German Workers' Movement], a giant backdrop to the staircase of the State Council of the DDR, 1964, Womacka had become most adept at using the framing of the stained glass for vignettes whilst also using large figures which transcend the frames – this greater fluidity is also achieved as there are no lead contours, the coloured glass adhering to a larger glass behind. [Fig. 3] In all of these, the format allowed for the simultaneous or sequential presentation of easily recognisable symbols and icons to transport the socialist message, whilst conferring the same doctrinal or sacred qualities of ecclesiastical architecture.

In another form of sacral reference, artists also adapted the tradition of the frame by frame narrative used on medieval bronze doors. An interesting example of this is a set of five doors by Gert Jäger,

[3] Berlin, Staatsratsgebäude, artist: Walter Womacka, *Aus der Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 1966; architecture: Roland Korn; interior; Hans Erich Bogatzky

Dresden – von Fischerdorf zur sozialistischen Großstadt, [Dresden. From Fishing Village to Socialist City], Kulturpalast [Palace of Culture], Dresden, which form the entrances to the otherwise highly international modern styled Dresden *Palace of Culture.* [Fig. 4, 5] Modernist architecture could not be as it was in its internationalist incarnation, universalist or placeless: it had to be rooted in its locality and within the logic of socialist historical progress. This technique, favoured for historical narratives which reach their inevitable triumph of socialism, is also used by Heinrich Apel on the doors of the City Hall at the Old Market, Magdeburg.

The framing technique was also used in the strongly developed school of tapestry from the Burg Giebichenstein School in Halle. Willi Sitte, Head of Textiles at Burg from 1952 (succeeded by Inge Gotze in

[4] Dresden, *Kulturpalast* [Palace of Culture], Gerd Jaeger, *Bronze Doors, Episoden aus der geschichtlichen Entwicklung Dresdens IV (1920–1945)* [Episodes from the historical development of Dresden, IV (1920–1945)]

[5] Dresden, *Kulturpalast* [Palace of Culture], architects: Leopold Wiel, Wolfgang Hänsch, Herbert Löschau

1972), encouraged his students to take influence from French modernists, in particular Jean Lurcat, who himself wanted to revive the medievalist spirit of tapestry as an art form in its own right. Thus, there are connections across traditions from early modernist to medieval in which socialist motifs and acceptable themes from nature and culture are interwoven. The influence of French tapestry traditions (students borrowed the French cockerel motif as symbolising the emergence from darkness to light)[19] combined with the cultural politics of realism resulted in a new tradition of the Halle Tapestry. Budgets were made available for these expensive commissions for the furnishing of state representative buildings as well as the homes of senior Party members in the ›feudal model of state pomp,‹[20] again in a form of assimilation of historical practices.

In some works of public art there are specific references to artists of the early modern period and to Mexican *muralismo*. For example, Willi Neubert in his enamel work *Die Presse* [The Press], 1964 references the central figure with its outstretched arms in Diego Rivera's *Theatre of the Insurgents* [Theatre of the Insurgents], Mexico, 1952; in his *Lebensbaum* [Tree of Life], 1966, Neubert's graphically and modishly simplified figures refer to Matisse and his harlequin figure to Cezanne or Picasso; in 1987 he borrows from Fernand Léger's aestheticized industrial forms and gradated grey tones superimposed

on primary colours to create volume. Neubert, also considered a realist painter, does not hide his admiration for the pre-war period of modernism and the industrial approach of the Bauhaus. His experiments and innovations with industrial enamel allowed him to achieve the illusion of depth through the juxtaposition of graphic forms and colour. Erich Enge too looks to the early modernists in *Lenins Wörter Werden Wahr* [Lenin's Words Become True], Halle-Neustadt, 1971, in which he encloses multiple socialist narratives in the manner of *muralismo* or Soviet constructivist graphics which pan out in jarring sections reminiscent of cubism or futurism. Womacka, too, quotes Picasso's *Femme au Chapeau* [Woman with a Hat] on the South side of *Haus des Lehrers* to illustrate the *Bitterfelder Weg*.

It is well known that none of these concessions to the formal means [*Gestaltungsmittel*] of modern art were easily won, and indeed are contrary to the early 1950s understanding of ›assimilation of tradition‹ which explicitly rejected modernism as compromised by its bourgeois associations. Willi Neubert gave a flavour of this, recounting an episode where he was a guest at the high table with party dignitaries, including Walter Ulbricht himself, as late as 1969. »Ulbricht said: ›You should all look more at the USSR‹, and I said, ›What about the Mexicans, they also have great art! And in a capitalist land and they are paid for by banks. It must be possible here too‹. Lotte Ulbricht stepped on my foot and said quietly, ›Don't push your luck!‹ Ulbricht said: ›We are our own socialist country and must do our own socialist thing.‹«[21]

It is fair to argue that these references align with the critical assimilation of historical tradition in order to create the new socialist art as proposed by the socialist realist method. By the mid 1960s, as Ulrike Goeschen has demonstrated, the argument that modern means [*Gestaltungsmittel*] were justified in expanding realism succeeded in overcoming the anti formalism dogma.[22] That the traditions to be assimilated were expanded after the VIII Party Congress in 1971, in which art was liberalised, is made explicit in the definition of socialist realism in the *Kulturpolitisches Wörtebuch*, 1978: »Relationships to the whole humanist, progressive and revolutionary artistic developments of the past, (including late bourgeois art).«[23]

Late bourgeois [*spätbürgerliche*] was official code for early modernism. However, modernist formal references in these murals cannot capture the progressive or radical impulses of Weimar Modernism – Expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit, Dada, etc. Whilst these bright, graphic and anti-naturalistic compositions were challenging and innovative in the context of reforming the conservative interpretation of socialist realism, they were arguably aestheticized conceptions of the modernist project. If we look again at the themes and narratives present within architectural art, they are not only readable, but are so surely readable that they offer what Leonid Heller calls ›a child vision

of sorts.‹[24] This suggests an infantilization of the public, particularly when viewed alongside the conservative moral order: nuclear family, wholesome activities, productive work, healthy living and so on. We can safely distance these works from the experimentalist, critical strands of early modernism. There is no dissonance, rupture, absurdity, satire or excursion into the unconscious.

Close to the people

The reception of art in the socialist realist scheme rested on a positivist cause and effect conception where art had the facility to be directly and affirmatively effective on consciousness. The expectation was that it should be closely connected to the people [*volksverbunden or narodnost*] and, in a related but subordinate category, be absorbed and accepted within the culture of working people [*volkstümlich*]. This latter category in practice in the GDR favoured folkish traditions which were considered ›authentic‹, in contrast to ›pseudo‹ popular artforms of Capitalism. *Volkstümlich* was elaborated by Bertolt Brecht in a 1938 essay on realism which was included in the encyclopaedic definition in the GDR. *Volkstümlich,* slightly misleadingly translated as *popular*, rested on the idea that the revolutionised people would take up and determine art, rather than being mere recipients.[25] Thus art need not be simple to be understood, but could become more subtle and complex as the educational and cultural horizons of working people increased, a process which First Secretary Walter Ulbricht identified as having taken place in the mid-1960s, thus allowing for a liberalisation of socialist realist interpretations. The definition of the connection to the people or need to be *volksverbunden* from the *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch* emphasizes that art must embody the other tenets of socialist realism, be interdependent with the aims of the Party and have class consciousness.

Leaving aside the subjective question of whether the art of public spaces was actually popular or stirred its viewers to revolutionary feelings, the relevant point is that the art was to be readable by lay people and practiced by lay people (evidenced by the many circles for artistic activities that were established in the GDR). This clearly distinguishes it from the modernist claims of the autonomy of art, and, as much politicised in the Cold War binaries, the modernist preoccupation with innovation in formal means. These critical differences to developments in international modernism help to explain why the didactic, readable and narrative functions of art in public spaces remained imperative within the architectural landscapes emerging in the 1960s, which we are now considering as *Ostmoderne*.

We should also consider how the urban plans themselves, and the architectural ensembles in which art was positioned, were concep-

[6] Besucher vor dem Stadtmodell im Neuen Rathaus, Lichthof, Exhibition: *Kulturvoll leben in sozialistisch gestalteter Umwelt*, 7–8.1969 [Visitors looking at a model of the city of Dresden in the New Town Hall, 1969]

tualised in their relationship to working people and their life processes. In the 1950s, the *Sixteen Principles of Urbanism* set out in the GDR prioritised an appropriation of national tradition and respect for the historical contours of the city (a clear rejection of modernist urbanism). This, combined with the pedagogical function of art, meant that public art was to have a particular role as part of an overarching narrative, a choreography of the experience of the socialist person as they moved through public spaces. In their ambition to structure social and economic life in its entirety through the organisation of the built environment, these principles resembled modernist ideals of the city but, as was observed at the time, the nationalisation of land and property under socialism made this a more realistic prospect. In the re-formation of town centres in the 1960s, which were no longer bound to the historic blueprint of the city, planning remained centred on the principles of meeting the human needs for work, life, culture and leisure, but also held to the totalising understanding of how social and economic life would be enacted within this. Architectural plans were to be discussed by representatives of different groups including working people, as were the artworks placed within them. This photo of a real but consciously staged event at the national and regional 1969 *Architecture and Art* exhibition *Kulturvoll leben in sozialistisch gestalteter Umwelt*, illuminates this principle. [Fig. 6]

According to the catalogue text of *Architecture and Art* in Halle, the exhibits showed: »The effort towards the anchoring of the socialist human community and the forming of the whole of socialist life.«[26]

Given that the pedagogical function of art reached beyond the confines of the artwork itself and into the entire city plan, public art in its omnipresence would have reached its intended audience and penetrated consciousness in line with the socialist realist *volksverbunden* principle. By the late 1960s, disaffection with the milieu-forming potential of system-built architecture was openly expressed; progressive ideas of Complex Environmental Design [*Komplexe Umweltgestaltung*] developed by academics were gaining ground, accompanied by a shift towards an acceptance of society and individuals (rather than simply ›the people‹).[27]

We can see how a shift began to occur in the thinking behind two artistic conceptions in Halle-Neustadt, one partially realised, and one not. In his panorama concept in the education area of the new town, the Spanish émigré Jose Renau conceived a series of murals which spanned over a kilometre of walking trajectory, from the swimming pool to the canteen and student accommodation. Renau developed his own methodology of ›photographic self-criticism‹ to analyse the viewpoints and different light effects that these giant screen-like projections would have on the passer by. The works were intended to have a revolutionising and penetrating effect on the mass consciousness.[28] In a slight shift, Sigbert Fliegel sought to analyse the movements of people within a living complex and to use these as a template for the positioning of art. In his conception for the fourth living complex in Halle Neustadt, Fliegel wrote: »Environmental designs are things of life, of change, which grow with people. The workers should therefore not only be surrounded by a system of artistic works [...] according to the intellectual needs at the point of completion of the residential complex. It is more important that people participate in the formation of this environment during the progress of their lives.«[29]

Fliegel was also interested in the choreography of public space and the curation of material, but his concept reflected the ideal of Complex Environmental Design, of a more organic process where the residents begin to form their environment and participate in its development.

Another statement from the plan for the centre of Berlin from 1973, put together by representatives of the artists' union and the local building authority, also tries to relate to the actual lives of people: »How should works of art in the urban spaces of life be designed, what should they express, where should they be positioned, when do they trigger emotions, create viewpoints, give pleasure? [...] We base our findings on the hypothesis that the works of art in the urban space are all the more persuasive if they are true to the ideas and real life processes of socialist society and the more they meet the needs, interests, wishes, aims of society, groups and individuals.«[30]

The comprehensive planning of space and furnishing with works of art and design conceptualised as sustaining and resulting from socialist life processes and the cycle of work and leisure, rather than for example capital flows or the cultivation of artistic prestige, points to the durability of the principle of *Volksverbundenheit* or closeness to the people.

Public art, its forms, materials and iconography, developed over the decades, using new materials, more abstract forms and more complex narratives. However, it retained the brief of readability and relevance to working people in their ›socialist life processes‹. The use of the term realism would not have been relished by reforming theorists and practitioners who embraced the modern and modernism,[31] but continued to be engaged regularly in published and official pronouncements to retain the allegiance to the ideal of a specifically socialist culture. Realist came to be used as meaning ›relating to the life of working people‹, as is evident in a catalogue essay from 1987, which describes a fountain sculpture by Karl Müller comprised of abstract forms. It states: »The forms and its details are so well aligned with societal relations [...] Is it not good and realistic at the same time if this fountain emphatically helps those searching for quiet and relaxation in a park. [...] Such designs have a communicative character insofar as they can lead people away from the undesired anonymity of modern technology.«[32]

By this time, much had changed since the Stalinist beginnings of socialist realism in the GDR; some might argue that the persistence of such rhetorical formats surrounding the term realism represented the final gasps of a dying ideal, the instrumentalization of reform and innovation towards ideologically pre-cast dogma. The shift of the authorities in the late 1970s and into the 1980s towards pockets of semi-historicist architecture (sometimes viewed as postmodernism), as a catharsis to the anonymity of mass housing, was resented by socialist liberal reformers. These academics, for example at the new Bauhaus (1980–1986), and the Weimar School of Architecture (HAB), sought to re-think creative and economic forms of architecture to meet the needs of contemporary socialist society.[33] Within the Central Working Group of Art and Architecture (ZAG), there was an increasing resentment regarding the authorities' inability to hear or respond to the generational shift. For them, the term realism may have been empty, but the concept of socialist realism and the term realism can nonetheless be helpful in describing this continuity, where the function of the built environment and material culture was to inculcate and facilitate socialist life. In this way it was markedly different from the projects of post-war modernism in the West. I propose that if we consider these as hybrid ›modernist-realist‹ forms, we do not diminish their significance as a part of history and heritage, but augment it.

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Notes

1 Organised by the Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat (BMI) und das Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBR), 2021–2023.
2 Bernhard Heisig, ›Von der Parteiaktivtagung zu Fragen der BK in der Möve‹, transcript of recording, 10.6.1964, 2, in: Archive AdK, Berlin, VBK Zentralvorstand – 70. The text and all the content of this argument is taken from Heisig's retraction.
3 Andreas Butter, Ulrich Hartung, *Ostmoderne: Architektur in Berlin 1945–1965*, Berlin 2004.
4 April Eisman, ›In the Crucible: Bernhard Heisig and the Hotel Deutschland Murals‹, in: Amy Wlodarski, Elaine Kelly (eds.), *Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture*, Amsterdam 2011, 21–39.
5 David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, Lincoln 1995.
6 Jessica R. Jenkins, *Picturing Socialism*, London 2021.
7 Nikolaos Drosos, Russian Archives of Art and Literature, RGALI 2606/2/361, in: id., *Modernism with a Human Face: Synthesis of Art and Architecture in Eastern Europe, 1954–1958*, diss. City University of New York 2016, 30.
8 Fjodorow Davydow, ›Die Zusammenarbeit von Architektur und Bildender Kunst‹, lecture at the Deutsche Akademie der Künste Berlin, 15.10.1954, DA 6/1954, 269.
9 Ibid.
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